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A DISHONOURED ARMY

GERMAN ATROCITIES IN FRANCE :

WITH UNPUBLISHED
RECORDS

BY

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(late Home Office Commissioner with the British Expeditionary Force).

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A DISHONOUR'D ARMY



GERMAN ATROCITIES IN FRANCE: WITH UNPUBLISHED RECORDS

IN November of last year I was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Home Affairs to undertake the investigation in France into the alleged breaches of the laws of war by the German troops, the inquiries in England being separately conducted by others. The results of my investigation were communicated to the Home Office, in the form of confidential reports and of depositions, diaries, proclamations, and other *pièces justificatives*, and were in turn submitted to the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister and presided over by Lord Bryce. The Committee made liberal use of this material, but, owing to the exigencies of space and the necessity of selection, some of it remains unpublished, and I now propose to place it and the conclusions I draw from it before the public. Some part of it, and that part the most important—namely, that which establishes proofs of a deliberate policy of atrocity by responsible German officers—came into my hands too late for use by the Committee. Moreover, the Committee felt that their first duty was to Belgium, and consequently the portion of the inquiry which related to France, and in particular to outrages upon British soldiers in France, occupies a comparatively small place in their publications. In this article I therefore confine myself to the latter branch of the inquiry, and the reader will understand that, except where otherwise stated, the documents here set out are now published for the first time.¹

My investigations extended over a period of four or five months. The first six weeks were spent in visiting the base hospitals and convalescent camps at Boulogne and Rouen, and the hospitals at Paris; during the remaining three months I was

¹ It is, however, impossible to include within the limits of this article the whole of the unpublished material at my disposal.

attached to the General Headquarters Staff of the British Expeditionary Force. In the course of my inquiries in the hospitals and camps I orally interrogated some two or three thousand officers and soldiers,² representing almost every regiment in the British armies and all of whom had recently been engaged on active service in the field. The whole of these inquiries were conducted by me personally, but my inquiries at headquarters were of a much more systematic character. There, owing to the courtesy of Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Murray, the late Chief of the General Staff, I had the assistance of the various services—in particular the Adjutant-General, the Provost-Marshal, the Director of Military Intelligence, the Director of Medical Services and their respective staffs—and also of the civil authorities, within the area at present occupied by the British armies, such as the sous-prefets, the procureurs de la République, the commissaires de police, and the maires of the communes. In this way I was enabled not only to obtain corroboration of the statements taken down in the base hospitals in the earlier stages of my inquiry, but also to make a close local study of the behaviour of the German troops towards the civil population during their occupation of the districts recently evacuated by them.³ In pursuance of this latter inquiry I visited every town and commune of any importance now in our occupation and lately occupied by the Germans, including places within a few hundred yards of the German lines. As regards the conduct of the German troops in the earlier stages of the campaign and in other parts of France, I confined my inquiries to incidents which actually came under the observation of our own troops during or after the battles of Mons, the Marne, and the Aisne, and did not extend them to include the testimony of the French civil authorities, as I did not consider it part of my duty to attempt to do what was already being done by the Commission of Inquiry instituted by the President of the Council. But I freely availed myself of opportunities of corroboration of English evidence from French sources where such sources were readily accessible and, by the courtesy of the French Ministry of War, who placed a Staff officer and a military car at my disposal, I was enabled to go over the ground to the north-east of Paris covered by our troops in their advance to the Aisne and to obtain confirmation of many incidents already related to me by British officers and soldiers. It was also my privilege frequently to meet M. Mollard, of the French Com-

² The term 'soldier' is used throughout this article in the sense adopted in the Army Annual Act, i.e. as meaning N.C.O.s and privates.

³ The outrages committed in the districts now in the occupation of the British armies have not been reported upon by the French Commission, and the ground so traversed in this article is therefore new.

mission, and to examine for myself the depositions on oath and *pièces justificatives* on which the first Reports of the Commission are based, and which are as yet unpublished. In these different ways I have been enabled to obtain an extensive view of the whole field of inquiry and to arrive at certain general conclusions which may be of some value.

METHODS OF INQUIRY

My method of inquiry was twofold—I availed myself of both oral evidence and written evidence. As regards the former, the evidence taken at the base hospitals was wholly of this character. The method which I adopted in taking it was as follows :

I made it a rule to explain to the soldier or officer at the outset that the inquiry was an official one, and that he must be prepared to put his name to any testimony he might elect to give.

I allowed the soldier to tell his story in his own way and in his own words, but after or in the course of the recital I always cross-examined him as to details, inquiring in particular (1) whether he directly witnessed the event himself ; (2) what was the date and place of the occurrence—to establish these I have frequently gone over the operations with the witness with the aid of a military map and a diary of the campaign ; (3) whether, in the case of hearsay evidence, he heard the story direct from the subject of it, and, in particular, whether he was versed in the language employed ; (4) whether he could give me the name of any person or persons with him, particularly officers, who also witnessed the event or heard the story.

After such cross-examination I then took down the narrative, if satisfied that it possessed any value, read it over to the soldier, and then obtained his signature. This, however, was often only the first stage, as I have not infrequently been able to obtain confirmation of the evidence so obtained by subsequent inquiries at General or Divisional Headquarters, either among members of the Staff or from company officers or from the civil authorities. For example, hearsay evidence of rape (and I always regarded such evidence as inconclusive of itself) tendered to me by soldiers at the base hospitals received very striking confirmation in the depositions of the victims on oath which had been taken by the civil authorities at Bailleul, Metteren, and elsewhere, and which were subsequently placed at my disposal. Personal inquiries made by me among the maires and curés of the communes where particular incidents were alleged to have occurred resulted in similar confirmation. So, too, the Indian

witnesses whom I examined at the base hospital were at my request subsequently re-examined, when they had rejoined their units, by the Intelligence Officers attached to the Indian Corps, and with much the same results. Corroborative evidence as to a policy of discrimination practised by the German officers in favour of Indians was also obtained from the record of statements volunteered by a German prisoner of the 112th Regiment and placed at my disposal by our Intelligence Officers.

The general impression left in my mind by these subsequent inquiries at headquarters as to the value of the statements made to me earlier by soldiers in hospital is that those statements were true. There is a tendency in some quarters to depreciate the value of the testimony of the British soldier, but the degree of its value depends a good deal on the capacity in which, and the person to whom, the soldier is addressing himself. In writing letters home or in talking to solicitous visitors the soldier is one person; in giving evidence in an official inquiry he is quite another. I have had opportunities when attending field courts-martial of seeing something of the way in which soldiers give evidence, and I see no reason to suppose that the soldier is any less reliable than the average civilian witness in a court of common law. Indeed, the moment I made it clear to the soldiers that my inquiry was an official one they became very cautious and deliberate in their statements, often correcting themselves or referring to their diaries (of which they usually take great care), or qualifying the narration with the statement 'I did not see it myself.' It need hardly be said that these observations as to the credibility of the soldiers apply no less to that of the officers. And it is worthy of remark that, apart from individual cases of corroboration of a soldier's evidence by that of an officer, the burden of the evidence in the case of each class is the same. Where officers do not testify to the same thing as the soldiers, they testify to similar things. The cumulative effect produced on my mind is that of uniform experience.

I have often found the statements so made subsequently corroborated; I have rarely, if ever, found them contradicted. I ascribe this result to my having applied rigid rules as to the reception of evidence in the first instance. I have always taken into account the peculiar receptivity of minds fatigued and overwrought by the strain of battle to the influences of 'suggestion,' whether in the form of newspapers or of oral gossip. It sometimes, but not often, happened that one could recognise the same story in a different investiture, although appearing at first sight to be a different occurrence. Or, again, it may happen that a story undergoes elaboration in the process of transmission until it looks worse than it originally was. So, too, a case of apparent

outrage may admit of several explanations; it may happen, for example, in the case of a suspicious use of the white flag that the act of one party of Germans in raising it and of another party in taking advantage of it were conceivably independent of one another. Cases of the shelling of 'undefended' places, of churches, and of hospitals, I have always disregarded if our men or guns were or lately had been in the vicinity; and it may easily happen that a case of firing on stretcher-bearers or ambulance waggons is due to the impossibility of discrimination in the midst of a general engagement. Wherever any of these features appeared to be present I rejected the evidence—not always nor necessarily because I doubted its veracity, but because I had misgivings as to its value.

OUTRAGES UPON COMBATANTS IN THE FIELD.

Lord Bryce's Committee, with that scrupulous fairness which so honourably distinguishes their Report, have stated that :

We have no evidence to show whether and in what cases orders proceeded from the officer in command to give no quarter, but there are some instances in which persons obviously desiring to surrender were nevertheless killed.

This is putting the case with extreme moderation, as the evidence at the disposal of the Committee, showing, as it did, that such barbarities were frequently committed when the German troops were present in force, raised a considerable presumption that they were authorised by company and platoon commanders at least, if not in pursuance of brigade orders. But after the Committee had concluded its labours, and, unfortunately, too late for its consideration, I succeeded, as the result of a long and patient investigation, in obtaining evidence which establishes beyond reasonable doubt that the outrages upon combatants in the field were committed by the express orders of responsible officers such as brigade and company commanders. The nature of that evidence (which is here published for the first time) I will disclose in a moment. But before doing so I will present the conclusions I had previously arrived at by a process of induction from individual cases. It will then be seen how the deductive method of proof from the evidence of general orders confirms the presumption raised by the evidence of particular instances.

A German military writer of great authority⁴ predicted some years ago that the next war would be one of inconceivable violence. The prophecy appears only too true as regards the conduct of German troops in the field; it has rarely been dis-

⁴ Von der Goltz.

tinguished by that chivalry which is supposed to characterise the freemasonry of arms. One of our most distinguished Staff officers remarked to me that the Germans have no sense of honour in the field, and the almost uniform testimony of our officers and men induces me to believe that the remark is only too true. Abuse of the white flag has been very frequent, especially in the earlier stages of the campaign on the Aisne, when our officers, not having been disillusioned by bitter experience, acted on the assumption that they had to deal with an honourable opponent. Again and again the white flag was put up, and when a company of ours advanced unsuspectingly and without supports to take prisoners, the Germans who had exhibited the token of surrender parted their ranks to make room for a murderous fire from machine-guns concealed behind them. Or, again, the flag was exhibited in order to give time for supports to come up. It not infrequently happened that our company officers, advancing unarmed to confer with the German company commander in such cases, were shot down as they approached. The Camerons, the West Yorks, the Coldstreams, the East Lancs, the Wiltshires, the South Wales Borderers, in particular, suffered heavily in these ways. In all these cases they were the victims of organised German units, i.e. companies or battalions, acting under the orders of responsible officers.

There can, moreover, be no doubt that the respect of the German troops for the Geneva Convention is but intermittent.⁵ Cases of deliberate firing on stretcher-bearers are, according to the universal testimony of our officers and men, of frequent occurrence. It is almost certain death to attempt to convey wounded men from the trenches over open ground except under cover of night. A much more serious offence, however, is the deliberate killing of the wounded as they lie helpless and defenceless on the field of battle. This is so grave a charge that were it not substantiated by the considered statements of officers, non-commissioned officers, and men, one would hesitate to believe it. But even after rejecting, as one is bound to do, cases which may be explained by accident, mistake, or the excitement of action, there remains a large residuum of cases which can only be explained by deliberate malice. No other explanation is possible when, as has

⁵ One might go further and say that the Geneva Convention, which has hitherto been universally regarded as a law of perfect obligation and which even the German Staff in the German War Book affects to treat as sacred, is perverted to an instrument of treachery. The emblem of the Red Cross was used to protect waggons in which machine-guns were concealed. And since this article was written a German hospital ship, the *Ophelia*, has been condemned, on irrefutable evidence, by our Prize Court as having been used for belligerent purposes. Such things throw a very lurid light on the German conception of honour.

not infrequently happened, men who have been wounded by rifle fire in an advance, and have had to be left during a retirement for reinforcements, are discovered, in our subsequent advance, with nine or ten bayonet wounds or with their heads beaten in by the butt-ends of rifles. Such cases could not have occurred, the enemy being present in force, without the knowledge of superior officers. Indeed, I have before me evidence which goes to show that German officers have themselves acted in similar fashion. Some of the cases reveal a leisurely barbarity which proves great deliberation; cases such as the discovery of bodies of despatch-riders burnt with petrol or 'pegged out' with lances, or of soldiers with their faces stamped upon by the heel of a boot, or of a guardsman found with numerous bayonet wounds evidently inflicted as he was in the act of applying a field dressing to a bullet wound. There also seems no reason to doubt the independent statements of men of the Loyal North Lancs, whom I interrogated on different occasions, that the men of one of their companies were killed on the 20th of December after they had surrendered and laid down their arms.* To what extent prisoners have been treated in this manner it is impossible to say—dead men tell no tales—but an exceptionally able Intelligence Officer at the headquarters of the Cavalry Corps informed me that it is believed that when British prisoners are taken in small parties they are put to death in cold blood. Certain it is that our men when captured are kicked, robbed of all they possess, threatened with death if they will not give information, and in some cases forced to dig trenches. The evidence I have taken from soldiers at the base hospitals on these points is borne out by evidence taken at the Front immediately after such occurrences by the Deputy Judge-Advocate General, an Assistant Provost-Marshal, and a captain in the Sherwood Foresters, and in the opinion of these officers the evidence which they took, and which they subsequently placed at my disposal, is reliable.

THE PROOFS OF POLICY

The question as to how far these outrages are attributable to policy and superior orders becomes imperative. It was at first difficult to answer. For a long time I did not find, nor did I expect to find, any documentary orders to that effect. Such orders, if given at all, were much more likely to be verbal, for it is extremely improbable that the German authorities would be so unwise as to commit them to writing. But the outrages upon combatants were so numerous and so collective in character that

* Similar evidence has been supplied to me by a French officer attached to the Fifth Division of the British Expeditionary Force.

I began to suspect policy at a very early stage in my investigations. My suspicions were heightened by the significant fact that exhaustive inquiries which I made among Indian native officers and men in the hospital ships in port at Boulogne, and at the base hospitals, seemed to indicate that experiences of outrage were as rare among the Indian troops as they were common among the British. The explanation was fairly obvious, inasmuch as many of these Indian witnesses who had fallen into German hands testified to me that the German officers' seized the occasion to assure them that Germany was animated by the most friendly feelings towards them, and more than once dismissed them with an injunction not to fight against German troops and to bring over their comrades to the German side. For example, a sepoy in the 9th Bhopals testified to me as follows :

I and three others were found wounded by the Germans. They bound up our wounds and invited us to join them, offering us money and land. I answered, 'I, who have eaten the King's salt, cannot do this thing and thus bring sorrow and shame upon my people.' The Germans took our chupattis, and offered us of their bread in return. I said, 'I am a Brahmin and cannot touch it.' They then left us, saying that if we were captured again they would kill us.

There was other evidence to the same effect. Eventually I obtained proofs confirming my suspicions, and I will now proceed to set them out.

On the 3rd of May I visited the Ministry of War in Paris at the invitation of the French military authorities, and was received by M. le Capitaine René Petit, Chef de Service du Contentieux, who conducted me to the department where the diaries of German prisoners were kept. I made a brief preliminary examination of them, and discovered the following passage (which I had photographed) in the diary of a German N.C.O., Götsche, of the 85th Infantry Regiment (the IXth Corps), fourth company detached for service, under date 'Okt. 6, 1914, bei Antwerpen' :

Der Herr Hauptmann rief uns um sich und sagte: 'In dem Fort, das zu nehmen ist, sind aller Wahrscheinlichkeit nach Engländer. Ich wünsche aber keinen gefangenen Engländer bei der Komp. zu sehen. Ein allgemeiner Bravo der Zustimmung war die Antwort.

(The Captain called us to him and said: 'In the fortress [i.e. Antwerp] which we have to take there are in all probability Englishmen. But I do not want to see any Englishmen prisoners in the hands of this company.' A general 'Bravo' of assent was the answer.)

This malignant frenzy against British troops, so carefully instilled, is borne out by a passage in another diary, now in the

' The German officers spoke Hindustani. Doubtless they knew, as I have found they often know, the identity of the British regiments opposite their positions and were attached there for the express purpose of dealing with Indians. But in no case, so far as I know, were their attempts to seduce our Indian troops successful.

possession of the French Ministry of War, which was found on the 22nd of April on the body of Richard Gerhold, of the 71st Regiment of Infantry of the Reserve, Fourth Army Corps, who was killed in September at Nouvron :

Auch hier kommen ja Sachen vor, was auch nicht sein darf, kommt aber doch vor. Grosse Greultaten kommen natürlich an Engländern und Belgiern vor. Nun da wird eben jeder ohne Gnaden niedergeknallt, aber wehe dem armen Deutschen der in ihre Hände kommt. . . .

(Here also things occur which should not be. Great atrocities are of course committed upon Englishmen and Belgians; every one of them is now knocked on the head without mercy. But woe to the poor German who falls into their hands.)

As regards the last sentence in this diary, which is one long chapter of horrors and betrays a ferocious credulity, it is worthy of remark that I have seen at the French Ministry of War the diary⁸ of a German N.C.O., named Schulze, who, judging by internal evidence, was a man of exceptional intelligence, in which the writer refers to tales of French and Belgian atrocities circulated among the men by his superior officers. He shrewdly adds that he believes the officers invented these stories in order to prevent him and his comrades from surrendering.

A less conclusive passage, but a none the less suspicious one, is to be found in a diary now in my possession. It is the diary of an Unter-offizier, named Ragge, of the 158th Regiment, and contains (under date October 21) the following :

Wir verfolgten den Gegner soweit wir ihn sahen. Da haben wir machen Engländer abgeknallt. Die Engländer lagen wie gesäht am Boden. Die noch lebenden Engländer im Schützengraben wurden erstochen oder erschossen. Unsere Komp. machte 61 Gefangene.

Which may be translated :

We pursued the enemy as far as we saw him. We 'knocked out' many English. The English lay on the ground as if sown there. Those of the Englishmen who were still alive in the trenches were stuck or shot. Our company made 61 prisoners.⁹

So far I have only dealt with the acts of small German units--i.e. companies of infantry. I now come to the most damning proofs of a policy of cold-blooded murder of wounded and prisoners, initiated and carried out by a whole brigade under the orders of a Brigadier-General. This particular investigation took me a long time, but the results are, I think, conclusive. It may

⁸ This diary is now in the possession of my friend the Marquis de Dampierre, who is about to publish it and numerous others, together with facsimiles of the originals.

⁹ The passage suggests that our wounded were killed, but it is not conclusive. 'Noch lebenden,' i.e. 'still living,' would appear to mean the wounded found in our trenches and unable to escape with the others. The fact of some prisoners being taken does not dispose of the suspiciousness of the passage.

be remembered that some months ago the French military authorities published in the French newspapers what purported to be the text of an order issued by a German Brigadier-General, named Stenger, commanding the 58th Brigade, in which he ordered his troops to take no prisoners and to put to death without mercy every one who fell into their hands, whether wounded and defenceless or not. The German Government immediately denounced the alleged order as a forgery. I determined to see whether I could establish its authenticity, and in February last I obtained a copy of the original from M. Mollard, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who is a member of the Commission appointed by the French Government to inquire into the alleged German atrocities. The text of that order was as follows :

Befehl (Armee-befehl) vom 26. Aug. 1914, gegen 4 Uhr nachm. wie er von Führer der 7 Komp. Reg. 112 (Infant.) bei Thionville, am Eingang des Waldes von Saint-Barbe, seinen Truppen als Brigade- oder Armee-befehl gegeben wurde :

Von heute ab werden keine Gefangene mehr gemacht. Sämtliche Gefangene werden niedergemacht. Verwundete ob mit Waffen oder wehrlos niedergemacht. Gefangene auch in grösseren geschlossenen Formationen werden niedergemacht. Es bleibt kein Mann lebend hinter uns.

(Army Order of 26 Aug., 1914, about 4 p.m., such as was given to his troops as a Brigade or Army Order by the leader of the 7th Company of the 112th Regiment of Infantry at Thionville, at the entrance of the wood of Saint Barbe.

To date from this day no prisoners will be made any longer. All the prisoners will be executed. The wounded, whether armed or defenceless, will be executed. Prisoners, even in large and compact formations, will be executed. Not a man will be left alive behind us.)

Taking this alleged order as my starting-point, I began to make inquiries at British Headquarters as to the existence of any information about the doings of the 112th Regiment. I soon found that there was good reason to suspect it. Our Intelligence Department placed in my hands the records of the examination of two men of this regiment who had been captured by us. One of them volunteered a statement to one of our Intelligence Officers on the 23rd of November to the effect that his regiment had orders to treat Indians well, but were allowed to treat British prisoners as they pleased. This man's testimony appeared to be reliable, as statements he made on other points, i.e. as to the German formations, were subsequently found to be true, and his information as to discrimination in the treatment of Indians entirely bore out the conclusions I had already arrived at on that particular point. The German witness in question further stated that 65 out of 150 British prisoners were killed in cold blood by their escort on or about the 23rd of October on the road to Lille, and that the escort were praised for their conduct. Other German

prisoners have, I may add, also made statements that they had orders to kill all the English who fell into their hands.

The evidence of this man of the 112th Regiment was as explicit and assured as it could be. But the matter did not stop there. At a later date an officer of the same regiment fell into our hands, in whose field note-book we found the memorandum 'Keine Gefangene' ('No prisoners'). He was immediately cross-examined as to the meaning of this passage, but he had a plausible explanation ready. It was to the effect that his men were not to make the capture of prisoners a pretext for retiring with them to the rear; but, having disarmed them, were to leave them to be taken back by the supports.

But at the end of April—too late, unfortunately, for use by Lord Bryce's Committee—one of our Intelligence Officers placed before me the following entry in the field note-book of a German prisoner, Reinhart Brenneisen,¹⁰ reservist, belonging to the 4th Company, 112th Regiment, and dated in August (the same month as appears on the face of the order in question):

Auch kam Brigadebefehl sämtliche Franzosen ob verwundet oder nicht, die uns in die Hände fielen, sollten erschossen werden. Es dürfte keine Gefangenen gemacht werden.

(Then came a brigade order that all French, whether wounded or not, who fell into our hands, were to be shot. No prisoners were to be made.)

This, I think, may be said to put the reality of the brigade order in question beyond doubt.

The cumulative effect of this evidence, coupled with the statements of so many of our men who claim to have been eye-witnesses of wholesale bayoneting of the wounded, certainly confirms suspicions of the gravest kind as to such acts having been done by authority. Neither the temperament of the German soldier nor the character of German discipline (*furchtbar streng*—'frightfully strict'—as a German prisoner put it to me) makes it probable that the German soldiers acted on their own initiative. It would, in any case, be incredible that so many cases of outrage could be sufficiently explained by any law of averages, or by the idiosyncrasies of the 'bad characters' present in every large congregation of men.

TREATMENT OF CIVIL POPULATION

The subject-matter of the inquiry may be classified according as it relates to: (1) ill-treatment of the civil population, and (2) breaches of the laws of war in the field. As regards the first it is not too much to say that the Germans pay little respect to life and none to property. I say nothing of the

¹⁰ Brenneisen is now a prisoner in England. The diary was a most carefully kept one.

monstrous policy of vicarious responsibility laid down by them in the Proclamations as to the treatment of hostages which I forwarded to the Committee and which I left to the Committee to examine; I confine myself to the practices which have come under my observation.¹¹ Here it is clear that the treatment of civilians is regulated by no more rational or humane policy than that of intimidation or, even worse, of sullen vindictiveness. As the German troops passed through the communes and towns of the arrondissements of Ypres, Hazebrouck, Bethune, and Lille, they shot indiscriminately at the innocent spectators of their march; the peasant tilling his fields, the refugee tramping the roads, and the workman returning to his home. To be seen was often dangerous, to attempt to escape being seen was invariably fatal. Old men and boys and even women and young girls were shot like rabbits. The slightest failure to comply with the peremptory demands of the invader has been punished with instant death. The curé of Pradelle, having failed to find the key of the church tower, was put against the wall and shot; a shepherd at a lonely farmhouse near Rebais who failed to produce bread for the German troops had his head blown off by a rifle; a baker at Moorslede who attempted to escape was suffocated by German soldiers with his own scarf; a young mother at Bailleul who was unable to produce sufficient coffee to satisfy the demands of twenty-three German soldiers had her baby seized by one of the latter and its head dipped in scalding water; an old man of seventy-seven years of age at La Ferté Gaucher who attempted to protect two women in his house from outrage was killed with a rifle shot.

I select these instances from my notes at random—they could be multiplied many times—as indications of the temper of the German troops. They might, perhaps, be dismissed as the unauthorised acts of small patrols were it not that there is only too much evidence to show that the soldiers are taught by their superiors to set no value upon human life, and things have been done which could not have been done without superior orders. For example, at Bailleul, La Gorgue, and Doulieu, where no resistance of any kind was offered to the German troops, and where the latter were present in force under the command of commissioned officers, civilians were taken in groups, and after being forced to dig their own graves were shot by firing parties in the presence of an officer. At Doulieu, which is a small village, eleven civilians were shot in this way; they were strangers to the place, and it was only by subsequent examination of the papers

¹¹ What follows refers principally to the portion of Northern France now occupied by the British troops. The case of Belgium has been sufficiently dealt with by the Committee.

found on their bodies that some of them were identified as inhabitants of neighbouring villages. If these men had been guilty of any act of hostility it is not clear why they were not shot at once in their own villages, and inquiries at some of the villages from which they were taken have revealed no knowledge of any act of the kind. It is, however, a common practice for the German troops to seize the male inhabitants (especially those of military age) of the places they occupy and take them away on their retreat. Twenty-five were so taken from Bailleul and nothing has been heard of them since. There is only too much reason to suppose that the same fate has overtaken them as that which befell the unhappy men executed at Doulieu. I believe the explanation of these sinister proceedings to be that the men were compelled to dig trenches for the enemy, to give information as to the movement of their own troops, and to act as guides (all clearly practices which are a breach of the laws of war and of the Hague Regulations), and then, their presence being inconvenient and their knowledge of the enemy's positions and movements compromising, they were put to death. This is not a mere surmise. The male inhabitants of Warneton were forced to dig trenches for the enemy, and an inhabitant of Merris was compelled to go with the German troops and act as a guide; it is notorious that the official manual of the German General Staff *Kriegsbrauch in Landskriege* condones, and indeed indoctrinates, such breaches of the laws of war. British soldiers who were taken prisoners by the Germans and subsequently escaped were compelled by their captors to dig trenches, and in a field note-book found on a soldier of the 100th Saxon Body Grenadiers (XIIth Corps) occurs the following significant passage :

My two prisoners worked hard at digging trenches. At midday I got the order to rejoin at village with my prisoners. I was very glad, as I had been ordered to shoot them both as soon as the French attacked. Thank God it was not necessary.

In this connexion it is important to observe that the German policy of holding a whole town or village responsible for the acts of isolated individuals, whether by the killing of hostages or by decimation or by a wholesale *battue* of the inhabitants, has undoubtedly resulted in the grossest and most irrelevant cruelties. A single shot fired in or near a place occupied by the Germans—it may be a shot from a French patrol or a German rifle let off by accident or mistake or in a drunken affray—at once places the whole community in peril, and it seems to be at once assumed that the civil inhabitants are guilty unless they can prove themselves innocent. This was clearly the case at Armentières. Frequently, as the field note-

book of a Saxon officer testifies, they are not allowed the opportunity. Indeed there seems some reason to suppose that the German troops hold the civil inhabitants responsible even for the acts of lawful belligerents, and, as my inquiries at Merris and Messines go to show, a French patrol cannot operate in the vicinity of a French or Belgian village without exposing the inhabitants to sanguinary punishment or predatory fines. There is not the slightest evidence to show that French civilians have fired upon German troops, and in spite of the difficulty of proving a negative there is a good deal of reason to reject such a supposition. Throughout the communes of the region of Northern France which I have investigated notices were posted up at the mairie requiring all the inhabitants to deposit any arms in their possession with the civil authorities, and the orders appear to have been complied with, as they were very strictly enforced.

In this matter of holding the civil population responsible with their lives for anything that may prove 'inconvenient' (*génant*), to quote a German Proclamation, to the German troops, the German commanders seem to have no sense of cause and effect. At Coulommiers, so the Mayor informed me, they threatened to shoot him because the gas supply gave out. In a town which I visited close to the German lines (and the name of which I suppress by request of the civil authorities for fear of a vindictive bombardment), the Mayor, who was under arrest in the guardroom, was threatened with death because a signal-bell rang at the railway station, and was in imminent peril until it was proved that the act was due to the clumsiness of a German soldier; and an exchange of shots between two drunken soldiers, resulting in the death of one of them, was made the ground of an accusation that the inhabitants had fired on the troops, the Mayor's life being again in peril. Where the life of the civilian is held so cheap, it is not surprising that the German soldier, himself the subject of a fearful discipline, is under a strong temptation to escape punishment for the consequences of his own careless or riotous or drunken behaviour by attributing those consequences to the civil population, for the latter is invariably suspect.

OUTRAGES UPON WOMEN—THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF BAILLEUL

When life is held so cheap, it is not surprising that honour and property are not held more dear. Outrages upon the honour of women by German soldiers have been so frequent that it is impossible to escape the conviction that they have been condoned and indeed encouraged by German officers. As regards

this matter I have made a most minute study of the German occupation of Bailleul. This place was occupied by a regiment of German Hussars in October for a period of eight days. During the whole of that period the town was delivered over to the excesses of a licentious soldiery and was left in a state of indescribable filth. There were at least thirty cases of outrages on girls and young married women, authenticated by sworn statements of witnesses and generally by medical certificates of injury. It is extremely probable that, owing to the natural reluctance of women to give evidence in cases of this kind, the actual number of outrages largely exceeds this. Indeed, the leading physician of the town, Dr. Bels, puts the number as high as sixty. At least five officers were guilty of such offences, and where the officers set the example the men followed. The circumstances were often of a peculiarly revolting character; daughters were outraged in the presence of their mothers, and mothers in the presence or the hearing of their little children. In one case, the facts of which are proved by evidence which would satisfy any court of law, a young girl of nineteen was violated by one officer while the other held her mother by the throat and pointed a revolver, after which the two officers exchanged their respective rôles.¹² The officers and soldiers usually hunted in couples, either entering the houses under pretence of seeking billets, or forcing the doors by open violence. Frequently the victims were beaten and kicked, and invariably threatened with a loaded revolver if they resisted. The husband or father of the women and girls was usually absent on military service; if one was present he was first ordered away under some pretext; and disobedience of civilians to German orders, however improper, is always punished with instant death. In several cases little children heard the cries and struggles of their mother in the adjoining room to which she had been carried by a brutal exercise of force. No attempt was made to keep discipline, and the officers, when appealed to for protection, simply shrugged their shoulders. Horses were stabled in salons; shops and private houses were looted (there are nine hundred authenticated cases of pillage). Some civilians were shot and many others carried off into captivity. Of the fate of the latter nothing is known but the worst may be suspected.

The German troops were often drunk and always insolent. But significantly enough, the bonds of discipline thus relaxed were tightened at will and hardly a single straggler was left behind.

Inquiries in other places, in the villages of Meteren, Oulter-

¹² After the outrage they dragged the girl outside and asked if she knew of any other young girls ('jeunes filles') in the neighbourhood, adding that they wanted to do to them what they had done to her.

steen, and Nieppe, for example, establish the occurrence of similar outrages upon defenceless women, accompanied by every circumstance of disgusting barbarity. No civilian dare attempt to protect his wife or daughter from outrage. To be in possession of weapons of defence is to be condemned to instant execution, and even a village constable found in possession of a revolver (which he was required to carry in virtue of his office) was instantly shot at Westoutre. Roving patrols burnt farmhouses and turned the women and children out into the wintry and sodden fields with capricious cruelty and in pursuance of no intelligible military purpose.

PRIVATE PROPERTY

As regards private property, respect for it among the German troops simply does not exist. By the universal testimony of every British officer and soldier whom I have interrogated the progress of German troops is like a plague of locusts over the land. What they cannot carry off they destroy. Furniture is thrown into the street, pictures are riddled with bullets or pierced by sword cuts, municipal registers burnt, the contents of shops scattered over the floor, drawers rifled, live stock slaughtered and the carcasses left to rot in the fields. This was the spectacle which frequently confronted our troops on the advance to the Aisne and on their clearance of the German troops out of Northern France. Cases of petty larceny by German soldiers appear to be innumerable; they take whatever seizes their fancy, and leave the towns they evacuate laden like pedlars. Empty ammunition waggons were drawn up in front of private houses and filled with their contents for despatch to Germany.

I have had the reports of the local commissaires of police placed before me, and they show that in smaller villages like those of Caestre and Merris, with a population of about 1500 souls or less, pillaging to the extent of 4000*l.* and 6000*l.* was committed by the German troops. I speak here of robbery which does not affect to be anything else. But it is no uncommon thing to find extortion officially practised by the commanding officers under various more or less flimsy pretexts. One of these consists of holding a town or village up to ransom under pretence that shots have been fired at the German troops. Thus at the village of Merris a sum of 2000*l.* was exacted as a fine from the Mayor at the point of a revolver under this pretence, this village of 1159 inhabitants having already been pillaged to the extent of some 6000*l.* worth of goods. At La Gorgue, another small village, 2000*l.* was extorted under a threat that if it were not forthcoming the village would be burnt. At Warneton, a small village, a fine of 400*l.* was levied. These fines were, it must be

remembered, quite independent of the requisitions of supplies. As regards the latter, one of our Intelligence officers, whose duty it has been to examine the forms of receipt given by German officers and men for such requisitions, informs me that, while the receipts for small sums of 100 francs or less bore a genuine signature, those for large sums were invariably signed 'Herr Hauptmann von Koepenick,' the simple peasants upon whom this fraud was practised being quite unaware that the signature has a classical fictitiousness in Germany.

OBSERVATIONS ON A TOUR OF THE MARNE AND THE AISNE

My investigations, in the company of a French Staff Officer, in the towns and villages of our line of march in that part of France which lies north-east of Paris revealed a similar spirit of pillage and wantonness. Coulommiers, a small town, was so thoroughly pillaged that the damage, so I was informed by the Maire, has been assessed at 400,000 francs, a statement which bore out the evidence previously given me by our own men as to the spectacle of wholesale looting which they encountered when they entered that town. At Barcy, an insignificant village of no military importance, I was informed by the Maire that a German officer, accompanied by a soldier, entered the communal archives and deliberately burnt the municipal registers of births and deaths—obviously an exercise of pure spite. At Choisy-aubac, a little village pleasantly situated on the banks of the Aisne, which I visited in company with a French Staff Officer, I found that almost every house had been burnt out. This was one of the worst examples of deliberate incendiarism that I have come across. There had been no engagement, and there was not a trace of shell-fire or of bullet marks upon the walls. Inquiries among the local gendarmerie, and such few of the homeless inhabitants as were left, pointed to the place having been set on fire by German soldiers in a spirit of pure wantonness. The German troops arrived one day in the late afternoon, and an officer, after inquiring of an inhabitant, who told me the story, the name of the village, noted it down, with the remark 'Bien, nous le rôtirons ce soir.' At nine o'clock of the same evening they proceeded to 'roast' it by breaking the windows of the houses and throwing into the interiors burning 'pastilles,' apparently carried for the purpose, which immediately set everything alight. The local gendarme informed us that they also sprayed (*arroso*) some of the houses with petrol to make them burn better. The humbler houses shared the fate of the more opulent, and cottage and mansion were involved in a common ruin. It seems quite clear that there was not the slightest pretext for this wanton behaviour,

nor did the Germans allege one. They did not accuse the inhabitants of any hostile behaviour; the best proof of this is that they did not shoot any of them, except one who appears to have been shot by accident.

A visit to Senlis in the course of the same tour fully confirmed all that the French Commission has already reported as to the cruel devastation wrought by the Germans in that unhappy town. The main street was one silent quarry of ruined houses burnt by the hands of the German soldiers, and hardly a soul was to be seen. Even cottages and *concièrges'* lodges had been set on fire. I have seen few sights more pitiful and none more desolate. Towns further east, such as Sermaizes, Nomeny, Gerbevillers, were razed to the ground with fire and sword and are as the Cities of the Plain.

Before I leave the subject of the treatment of private property by the German troops, I should like to draw the attention of the reader to some unpleasant facts which throw a baneful light on the temper of German officers and men. If one thing is more clearly established than another by my inquiries among the officers of our Staff and divisional commands, it is that *châteaux* or private houses used as the headquarters of German officers were frequently found to have been left in a state of bestial pollution, which can only be explained by gross drunkenness or filthy malice. Whichever be the explanation, the fact remains that, while to use the beds and the upholstery of private houses as a latrine is not an atrocity, it indicates a state of mind sufficiently depraved to commit one. Many of these incidents, related to me by our own officers from their own observations, are so disgusting that they are unfit for publication. They point to deliberate defilement.

The public has been shocked by the evidence, accepted by the Committee as genuine, which tells of such mutilations of women and children as only the Kurds of Asia Minor had been thought capable of perpetrating. But the Committee were fully justified in accepting it—they could not do otherwise—and they have by no means published the whole. Pathologists can best supply the explanation of these crimes. I have been told by such that it is not at all uncommon in cases of rape or sexual excess to find that the criminal, when satiated by lust, attempts to murder or mutilate his victim. This is presumably the explanation—if one can talk of explanation—of outrages which would otherwise be incredible. The Committee hint darkly at perverted sexual instinct. Cases of sodomy and of the rape of little children did undoubtedly occur on a very large scale. Some of the worst things have never been published. This is not the time for mincing one's words but for plain speech. Disgusting though

it is, I therefore do not hesitate to place on record an incident at Rebais related to me by the Mayor of Coulommiers in the presence of several of his fellow-townsmen with corroborative detail. A respectable woman in that town was seized by some Uhlans who intended to ravish her, but her condition made rape impossible. What followed is better described in French :

Mme. H—, cafetière à Rebais, mise nue par une patrouille allemande, obligée de parcourir ainsi toute sa maison, chassée dans la rue et obligée de regarder les cadavres de soldats anglais. Les allemands lui barbouillent la figure avec le sang de ses règles.

It is almost needless to say that the woman went mad. There is very strong reason to suspect that young girls were carried off to the trenches by licentious German soldiery, and there abused by hordes of savage and licentious men. People in hiding in the cellars of houses have heard the voices of women in the hands of German soldiers crying all night long until death or stupor ended their agonies. One of our officers, a subaltern in the sappers, heard a woman's shrieks in the night coming from behind the German trenches near Richebourg l'Avoué; when we advanced in the morning and drove the Germans out a girl was found lying naked on the ground 'pegged out' in the form of a crucifix. I need not go on with this chapter of horrors. To the end of time it will be remembered, and from one generation to another, in the plains of Flanders, in the valleys of the Vosges, and on the rolling fields of the Marne, the oral tradition of men will perpetuate this story of infamy and wrong.

I should say that in the above summary I have confined myself to the result of the inquiries I made at General Headquarters and in the area of our occupation, and have not attempted to summarise the evidence I had previously taken from the British officers and soldiers at the base, as the latter may be left to speak for itself in the depositions already published by the Committee. The object of the summary is to show how far independent inquiries on the spot go to confirm it. The testimony of our soldiers as to the reign of terror which they found prevailing on their arrival in all the places from which they drove the enemy out was amply confirmed by these subsequent and local investigations.

It will, of course, be understood that these inquiries of mine were limited in scope and can by no means claim to be exhaustive. For one thing, I was the only representative of the Home Office sent to France for this purpose; for another, I did not become attached to General Headquarters until the beginning of February, and before that time little or nothing had been done in the way of systematic inquiry

by the Staff, whose officers had other and more pressing duties to perform. By that time the testimony to many grave incidents, especially in the field, had perished with those who witnessed them and they remained but a sombre memory. The hearsay evidence of these things which was sometimes all that was left made an impression on my mind as deep as it was painful, but it would have been contrary to the rules of evidence, to which I have striven to conform, for me to take notice of it.

Two things clearly emerge from this observation. One is that had there been from the beginning of the campaign a regular system of inquiry at General Headquarters into these things, *pari passu* with their occurrence, the volume of evidence, great though it is, would have been infinitely greater; the other, that, as there is only too much reason to suppose that with the growing vindictiveness of the enemy things will be worse before they are better, the case for the establishment of such a system throughout the continuance of the War is one that calls for serious consideration.

Although I have some claims to write as a jurist I have here made no attempt to pray in aid the Hague Regulations in order to frame the counts of an indictment. The Germans have broken all laws, human and divine, and not even the ancient freemasonry of arms, whose honourable traditions are almost as old as war itself, has restrained them in their brutal and licentious fury. It is useless to attempt to discriminate between the people and their rulers; an abundance of diaries of soldiers in the ranks shows that all are infected with a common spirit. That spirit is pride, not the pride of high and pure endeavour, but that pride for which the Greeks found a name in the word *ὑβρις*, the insolence which knows no pity and which feels no love. Long ago Renan warned Strauss of this canker which was eating into the German character. Pedants indoctrinated it, Generals instilled it, the Emperor preached it. The whole people were taught that war was a normal state of civilisation, that the lust of conquest and the arrogance of race were the most precious of the virtues. On this Dead Sea fruit the German people have been fed for a generation until they are rotten to the core.

J. H. MORGAN.

